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ABSTRACT

The current accountability movement in education is examined in terms of its historical antecedents and federal versus state initiatives and requirements. The assumptions underlying the educational accountability movement are then considered, and refinements and extensions to these assumptions are proposed. The accountability movement in American education has been based on certain key assumptions, some of which have never been fully validated. These assumptions are as follows: (1) stricter accountability requirements lead to improvements in education; (2) meaningful educational improvements can be implemented through legislatively mandated accountability; (3) the most appropriate focal point for accountability-driven reform is the individual school; and (4) broad involvement of the school and district community is essential for successful accountability-driven school reform. The evidence supporting these assumptions is weak at best. Accountability has a legitimate role to play in school reform by stimulating the generation and reporting of data needed to evaluate reform efforts. Mandated accountability can be a useful lever for educational restructuring if it engenders change in cultural values of educators at all levels. There is an eight-item list of references. (SLD)

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IS EDUCATIONAL REFORM THROUGH MANDATED ACCOUNTABILITY AN OXYMORON?

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of A Nation At Risk, the report of the national commission on educational excellence, in 1983, sparked a new wave of school reform and with it a renewed emphasis on educational accountability at the federal, state and local levels. The educational reform movement engendered by that report has recently turned away from an emphasis on inputs, processes and curriculum content toward mandated accountability focused on student outcomes. Can mandated accountability be an effective force for educational reform? Can stricter accountability requirements at federal, state and local levels result in improvements in student achievement? What evidence exists that mandating stronger accountability requirements will improve education? This article explores these issues and examines the assumptions underlying the current accountability movement.

Purpose

This article has three purposes: (1) to examine the current accountability movement in terms of its historical antecedents, and federal v. state level initiatives and requirements; (2) to examine the assumptions underlying the educational accountability movement; and (3) to propose refinements and extensions to these assumptions, based on observation, experience and existing research.

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Historical Context

Early Trends in Accountability

The current accountability movement has historical antecedents that date back to the early 1900s and beyond. Educational accountability languished during the 1930s and 1940s, but enjoyed a minor reawakening in the late 1950s, during the Sputnik reform movement. The late sixties marked the beginning of mandated accountability in federal programs, while accountability in the seventies was characterized by applications of systems models and complex technical accounting systems. Now, in the 1990s we see accountability being employed as a tool for educational reform on a national scale. Historically, the accountability movement reflects continuing trends that have shaped American education and indeed, our whole society.

Wynne(1972), cites Plutarch as an early advocate of accountability:

> *"Fathers themselves, ought every few days to test their children, and not rest their hopes on the disposition of a hired teacher: for even those persons will devote more attention to the children if they know they must from time to time render an account." (p.30)*

Henry Barnard, who was at the time a Connecticut state school official, persuaded President Van Buren to include questions about the national level of literacy in the 1840 census. The original federal Department of Education, established in 1867 was based on congressional arguments favoring greater accountability. The charge of the new department was to "... collect such statistics and acts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several states and territories." (Wynne, 1972, p.31) The

Department of Education, which later became the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) and still later, under the Carter Administration, regained its original title along with cabinet level status, was under funded and was thus unable to collect and use the output data it was originally intended to collect.

Horace Mann persuaded local Boston school committees to administer uniform written exams to corroborate his criticisms of the Boston schools of that era. (Wynne, 1972) In mid-19th century England, schools were funded on the basis of students' scores on a standardized exam administered by government school inspectors. A similar system of accountability was found in Ontario, Canada from 1876 to 1882 where payments to high schools were based on the number of students who passed an intermediate exam after a year or two of schooling. This resulted in coaching for the exams and a concentration of teaching efforts on students in the middle and just below the middle range of achievement. The lowest achieving students were ignored because they were not considered to be worth the effort required to coach them (Sciara, F. and Jantz, R., 1972).

Scientific Management Influence

The era from the beginning of the twentieth century through the 1920s was characterized by applications of the scientific management principles of Frederick Taylor to the operation of schools. (Lessinger, 1970) Raymond Callahan in Education and the Cult of Efficiency (cited in Sciara and Jantz, 1972) writes:

> *"By 1915 there were specified 'efficiency bureaus' set up in major cities where 'educational efficiency experts' worked full time developing rating procedures to measure teachers' performance and to apply the principles of scientific management to education."* (Sciara and Jantz, 1972, p.29)

Principles and techniques heralded as new (to education) by Lessinger and others in the 1970s were basically the same as those that dominated public education during this earlier period. Callahan (op. cit.) summarized the effects of this efficiency movement as resulting in placing scientific labels on "unscientific and dubious methods" and strengthening an already prevalent anti-intellectual climate in the schools.

The Post-Sputnik Era of Federal Legislation

The launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957 shocked American education into increasing its emphasis on mathematics and science education. This new emphasis was accompanied by an increased concern for accountability.

Project TALENT, sponsored by USOE in 1959 was the first large scale effort in modern school output evaluation. Prior to this the emphasis had been on input variables, such as number of students served, number of hours or days of instruction, teacher education levels, costs per student and so forth. Project TALENT analyzed the performance of students from a large number of schools on uniform objective and traditional tests, against such variables as levels of expenditure, size of classes, qualifications of teachers and student socioeconomic background. Although TALENT was a research study and was not intended as an accountability effort, it had a profound effect on accountability legislation that would follow. When Francis Keppel, U.S. commissioner of Education testified before congress on behalf of the Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, he cited Project TALENT findings that the achievement of lower socioeconomic level students was below other students of the same age and grade.

The War on Poverty

Several of the educational programs that were born out of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" included mandated evaluation as a

contingency of continued funding. In its originally proposed form, ESEA Title I included a requirement for triennial evaluations to be reported by the districts and states. Senator Robert Kennedy was most influential in getting the requirement changed to annual evaluations. (Wynne, op cit.) Other ESEA programs including accountability audit requirements were Title VII-Bilingual and Title VIII-Dropout prevention. These audits like Title I, required outcome measures, based on previously established student performance goals.

In 1966 the report of The Commission on Equal Educational Opportunity (Coleman Report) concluded that input variables such as class size, teacher education levels, modern facilities, etc., do not provide reliable indicators of school effectiveness. This report provided President Nixon with much of the information that resulted in his "Message on Education Reform" speech in March of 1970. That speech is attributed with having ushered in a new era of accountability.

Standardized Testing as an Accountability Tool

The first nationwide National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing began in 1970. Since then NAEP has had a profound influence on educational accountability. By reporting student performance on a broad sampling of what students are expected to know and reporting results through popular media, NAEP captures public attention and focuses it on the alleged failures of the education system to adequately prepare students for the world they face following their public schooling. (Sciara and Jantz, 1972) More recently, international comparisons have revealed that American students do not perform as well on math, science and social studies tests as do students in many other countries, including Japan, (West) Germany and Sweden. We have, as a nation, become highly sensitized to the alleged inadequacies of American education as reflected in standardized test scores such as those

provided by NAEP and the college entrance examinations of American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) produced by Educational Testing Service (ETS). These scores are often used to make two types of arguments: 1.) that American students are not as well educated as their foreign counterparts, and 2.) that our educational system is not as effective and productive today as it was at some time in the past. Over the past several years, however, the validity of standardized tests as measures of what students ought to know has come under severe scrutiny. (Fairtest) Bracey (1990) has explicated the folly of using such indicators as ACT/SAT scores to compare today's students with those of two, three and four decades ago. His potent argument, pivoting around demographic changes and a broader base of students taking such tests can easily be extended to question the value of other standardized test scores as indicators of American educational decline.

Scientific Management Revisited - the 1970s

Leon Lessinger is recognized as the most influential advocate of accountability of the early 1970s. His book Every Kid a Winner (Lessinger, 1970) called for broad application of engineering principles to education to attain greater control and measurability over the educational process. The performance contract and the educational outcome audit were the key elements in Lessinger's accountability model. Lessinger called for the application of cost accounting strategies and outcome measures that would tie costs to outcomes. Among his proposals was the now increasingly popular "certified diploma" certifying the specific tasks that a student is able to perform.(Kirst, 1990)

Sciara and Jantz (1972) heralded this new wave of accountability and predicted the dawning of "an age of accountability" that would

become one of the most significant educational movements of the 1970s.

> *"...Beginning as a flickering spark in the twilight of the sixties, and fanned into flame by the federal government, politicians, taxpayers, unhappy parents as well as private learning corporations, accountability has been transformed from a theoretical notion to a formidable force in American education."* (p.3)

As defined by Sciara and Jantz, accountability has two components: 1.) public schools must prove that students at various levels meet some reasonable standards of achievement and 2.) schools must show that they use funds wisely - that educational outcomes justify expenditures. This wave of renewed accountability culminated in the wholesale application of such systems approaches as Program Evaluation and Review Techniques (PERT), Program Planning and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), management by objectives (MBO) and other techniques borrowed from the defense industry and the private sector. The principles underlying these techniques were very similar to those that had been applied without effect in the first quarter of the century. Their thrust was to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness, while focusing primarily on input and process variables.

Krueger (1970, in Sciara and Jantz) identified ten factors that must be in place if (program) accountability is to be effective:

1.) community involvement and support;

2.) technical assistance, which includes a "capability survey" of program goals, objectives, activities, functions and the assessment of system capabilities;

3.) needs assessment;

4.) management systems (e.g. PERT, PPBS, etc.);

5.) performance objectives, the "...keystone of program accountability";

6.) performance contracting, emphasizing output factors over inputs (e.g. student test scores as basis for teacher compensation);
7.) staff development;
8.) comprehensive evaluation;
9.) cost-effectiveness and finally
10.) program audit, the purpose of which is to improve program operations.

These ten factors are neither discrete nor independent. Many of these are reflected in state level accountability programs implemented in the 1980s. At least seven of the ten are present in the Colorado accountability requirements. Of these ten only the complex, detailed management systems approaches appear to have lost favor with policy makers.

Despite their zeal for micro-management by means of detailed and complex monitoring systems, these 1970s devotees of the Lessinger approach did not necessarily see accountability as the panacea for all of our educational problems. As Krueger stated:

> *"The challenge before us is that of demonstrating that accountability <u>can</u> contribute to the fulfillment of all legitimate concerns, that it <u>should</u> expose illegitimate concerns, that it <u>is</u> worth the expenditures of effort required and that it <u>need not</u> be devoid of humanism. Meanwhile, we dare not promote accountability as a panacea for the many complex problems of American education. These problems will not be solved by a single minded approach."* (Sciara and Jantz, p.17)

Accountability in the 1970s seemed to focus on getting "more bang for the buck." (Pipho, 1989 in Evaluation Comment, Dec. 1989) The tools of that period (PPBS,MBO,MIS, PERT) were intended to

enhance the *efficiency* of schools, not the *quality* of education as indicated by student outcomes. Educational policy makers now seem to be moving toward accountability that is more closely tied to instruction, measuring student performance and assigning the responsibility for improving the situation.

Effective Schools Research

The effective schools research movement of the 1970s, led by Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte and others can be seen in part, as a response to increased accountability demands, and as a response to the dual issues of equity and excellence raised by the Coleman Report. This movement was characterized by a search for the answer to the question "what makes a school effective?" What are the traits and characteristics of an effective school? Effective schools research resulted in lists of characteristics of effective schools and effective teacher practices that are now used as guidelines for school improvement and recognition efforts. (Fetler, 1987) One of the common conclusions of the effective schools research was that the school itself, rather than the district or the classroom should be the focal point for educational reform. Effective teachers teach in effective schools and effective classrooms are not likely to exist in a school in which the principal is not an instructional leader and from which the other recognized attributes of effectiveness are missing.

This conclusion has driven reform legislation in numerous states including California, Colorado, Georgia, South Carolina and others focusing on the school as the unit of change for educational reform through stronger accountability.

The accountability movement of the seventies also resulted in establishing minimum competency standards in many states and to a proliferation and expansion of statewide assessment programs. Test

publisher's profits may have benefited, but did the quality of education improve? If so, where is the evidence?

A Nation at Risk Ushers in a New Era

In 1984, the year following A Nation at Risk, the Department of Education released its first wall chart, "The Nation's Report Card." State departments of education soon followed suit with their own collections of indicators of quality in education. According to Kirst (1990), 40 states put new state testing requirements into effect in the 1980s. Complex SEA data bases consisting of dozens of "indicator" variables are being developed and refined for the purpose of monitoring school and district performance. These performance indicators bear the dual potential for either 1.) helping to raise academic standards or 2.) narrowing the focus of education onto the more easily measured outcomes.

The Governor's Summit - A New Wave of Reform Based on Accountability

In 1989 President Bush convened an "Education Summit" of the nation's governors, at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, to examine the condition of American education and draft goals and propose measures to improve it. This historic event led to a new wave of education reform driven by accountability and undergirded by a set of general educational goals for the nation. The National Governors' Association's Committee on Educational goals, has established general goals for American education and has targeted grades 4, 8 and 12 for nation-wide proficiency testing. Now known as "America 2000", this drive for a national achievement testing program comes at a time when large scale standardized testing is under intense fire for its failure to authentically measure student achievement of meaningful knowledge and skills. This push for more authentic testing is having a profound effect on assessment practice and policy at all levels of education. (Hansen, J. and Hathaway, W., 1991)

From Reform to Restructuring

The rhetoric of the reform movement changed in the late 1980s to embrace the term "restructuring", thereby reflecting once again the trend in the business and industrial sector of our economy and the rapid changes occurring in our society. The increasingly competitive global economy forced many companies large and small to restructure in order to survive. This restructuring often took the form of eliminating non-essential or non-profitable products and services, increasing employee involvement in decision making, distributing power and authority to departments and functional units, focusing on increased customer satisfaction and paring down top heavy management structures. Education has now begun to emulate this approach through site based management, teacher empowerment, collaborative decision making and increased community involvement. As indicated by Berry, Buehler and Small (1991):

> *"School improvement efforts since "A Nation At Risk" have pointed to the need to 'restructure' our schools....There must be a focus on restructuring bureaucracy and people."* (p.4)

The focus during this era has begun to shift from change as an event to change as a process that transforms the bureaucratic nature of schools and the people in them. Berry, et al (1991) cite four essential characteristics of change that must be implemented and evaluated within a school system as "practical and necessary conditions" for people within the system to be more productive: 1) administrative vision and leadership, 2.) leadership through empowerment and organizational teaming, 3.) goal definition, and 4.) management of incremental change.

DISCUSSION

Some Underlying Assumptions of the Accountability Movement

As described above, the accountability movement in American education has been based on certain key assumptions. Although some of the assumptions of the earlier decades have never been fully validated they have been retained and added to as each successive wave of reform and its attendant accountability requirements have evolved. What are these assumptions and what evidence has been compiled to support them?

Assumption One: stricter accountability requirements lead to improvements in education.

From the incentive systems of 19th century England and Canada to the scientific management approach of the early 1900s and the Lessinger led engineering-accounting strategies of the 1970s, and now more than ever, this assumption has been the raison d'etre for, accountability efforts. My recent and extensive search of the literature on effects of accountability yielded sparse evidence that it had produced measurable or observable improvements in educational outcomes. In fact, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, often used as a key indicator of educational health trends in the United States, reflect a slight downward trend in reading scores for 9 and 13 year olds from 1980 through 1988. (Educational Testing Service, 1990)

According to a Council of State School Officers (CCSSO) study group report (OERI, 1988) there is evidence in data from California, Florida and Georgia, that State accountability systems are producing intended results, leaving open to question effects in other non-tested curriculum areas. The CCSSO report indicates that local district officials have taken accountability requirements seriously and "changed their behavior in order to improve performance.

However that performance has been narrowly defined by the focus and scope of state tests. The CCSSO report further concludes that although school personnel in these states are responding to the State accountability systems, they do not view them as useful or valid measures of their school's performance. One should question whether this type of compliance behavior based on a lack of belief in the system, can result in meaningful or lasting improvements in educational outcomes. An interesting dilemma exists in pursuing this issue in that the best measures available for gauging the effects of any educational reform on improved student learning are the norm-referenced standardized tests that are now criticized as inadequate measures of educational quality. It is interesting and perhaps somewhat paradoxical, that scores on similar tests were used as a major screening device for identifying the potentially "effective schools" for the effective schools research of the 1970s and 80s.

National studies of federally funded programs such as Compensatory Education (Chapter 1), have failed to reveal any significant improvements that can be attributed directly to accountability. Does this mean that accountability as a tool for reform, is ineffective? Not necessarily. Alternative explanations include: 1.) accountability can have an effect on the improvement of education if adequate resources are made available to remediate the deficiencies revealed through the accountability process, and 2.) in order for accountability to result in educational improvements, it must be linked through research to effective instructional practices.

While focusing on outcomes may be an improvement over focusing on inputs and processes, there is a link missing between known instructional processes and desired outcomes. Research is needed to explore relationships among the separate domains of intrinsic learner variables, context variables, instructional variables and

different types of desired learner outcomes (behavioral, affective, cognitive, etc.) Without such research to guide restructuring efforts, state and federal mandates for reform are not likely to have their desired effects. As reported in a background paper for the 1989 California Educational Summit, there is a need to base decisions and actions for change on a knowledge of how children learn and the knowledge of effective ways to teach a broad spectrum of students. This is increasingly true as demographic trends continue to increase the diversity of our school age population. "Increasing teacher participation and sharing decision making do not ensure that decisions being made will result in improved teaching and learning." (California Educational Summit Papers, 1989, p.73) We must also redesign curriculum and commit to using varied teaching strategies that are shown to be effective with different student populations. This requires a sound research base.

Assumption Two: Meaningful educational improvements can be effected through legislatively mandated accountability.

If Assumption One could be validated then Assumption Two might have a chance at verifiability. In the absence of compelling evidence to support Assumption One, this second assumption becomes irrelevant. However, let us suspend our disbelief in number one long enough to examine number two.

Mandates aimed at the local school or district require changes in the school or district culture. As Berry, et al (1991) indicated schools and school systems are bureaucracies and are by nature resistant to change. Cultural change must be both pervasive and incremental in order to be effective. Change must occur in values, assumptions and behavioral norms in order for measurable effects to emerge. These cultural changes cannot be accomplished without additional resources for staff development, new program develop-

ment, instructional materials, development of assessment tools, etc. (Fetler, 1987; California Educational Summit Papers, 1987).

As Sarason(1990) has pointed out so clearly, attempts at school reform in the past have failed, at least in part, because they have have not taken a systemic approach to schol reform. According to Sarason, reform efforts that do not treat the school as an integrated system, comprised of numerous interacting subsystems (e.g. teaching, learning, administration, organization,etc.) are doomed to failure. Yet few if any accountabilty mandates take such a systemic view.

Assumption Three: The most appropriate focal point for accountability driven reform is the individual school.

Both the individual school and the school district are targets of the current "accountability as reform" movement. In California, for example, accountability is viewed as an essential component of school reform. The California Accountability Program consists of four major components: an annual statewide report on the status of various educational quality indicators, annual individual school reports of progress on the same indicators, school self reports on local quality indicators and an active school recognition program. (Fetler, 1987) The California Department of Education collects data on over 40 quality performance indicators at the high school level. The Performance Report for California Schools is sent to each school in California, annually, to provide them with data for planning at the school level. It contains data enabling them to compare themselves with other schools with similar characteristics in terms of their improvement on state indicators from the base year. A California Accountability Index (CAI) is under development which will integrate information from several indicators into a single number. The CAI will assess the percentage of students above designated levels on certain indicators. (California Educational Summit Papers, 1989)

California also provides incentives for school improvement through the California School Recognition Program. This program showcases outstanding educational achievement and fosters excellence . It employs a comprehensive screening process based on multiple quality indicators, a review of applications and visits to the schools to verify their quality. Quality criteria derived from effective schools research are used to review the effectiveness of the school's curriculum, instructional program and school wide organizational strategies. (California Educational Summit, 1989) The California approach probably comes closest to a systemic approach, than most, if not all other state mandated accountability programs.

Accountability in Colorado seeks to promote reform by mandating improvement in achievement, attendance, and graduation rates for schools and districts through State Board of Education goals. Colorado law requires that an accountability advisory committee exist at each school and for each district. The building level accountability committee (BAC) assists the principal to analyze strengths and weaknesses, set goals and develop a state mandated School Improvement Plan (SIP) on an annual basis. The District Accountability Committee must review SIPs and advise the local board on the development of an annual District Improvement Plan (DIP). The SIPs and the DIP must address each of the three state goals as well as at least one additional goal that is based on a need derived from reviewing data about the school or district. The state's triennial accreditation compliance audit incorporates the accountability requirements into the accreditation review process so that failure to meet all requirements can result in suspension of a district's accreditation by the state.

What evidence is there to confirm the effectiveness of these building focused accountability programs? Colorado has had similar accountability legislation on its books since 1971, but there is

no body of data that points to the improved educational performance of Colorado schools during these past two decades. In fact, statewide indicators such as ACT and SAT scores, attendance rates, graduation rates, and dropout statistics have all declined during this period of time? Does mandated accountability work?

While the California summit papers allude to improvements in student performance since the California School Recognition Program began in 1984, concrete evidence to verify these claims is scanty.

Assumption Four: Broad involvement of the school and district community is essential for successful accountability driven school reform.

This assumption is key to some of the state mandated programs such as that found in Colorado, but is not universal. While it sounds logical and highly appealing, once again we find a dearth of evidence to support it. The most famous (or infamous) case of broad community involvement in school reform is to be found in the Chicago Public Schools where each school is managed by a citizens committee representing the school community. After more than two years of this unique arrangement involving numerous court battles, there is no evidence to indicate that it has worked to increase student achievement. The problems of poverty, privation and the paucity of resources to remediate the home and family conditions experienced by the children of a growing social underclass in our cities, have thus far been resistant to our most well intended efforts to improve them. Numerous studies, including those by Kirst (1990), Berry et. al (1991) and CCSSO (1988) have recommended the inclusion of data on context variables such as family income, ethnic background, welfare status etc. in the indicator systems developed by state education agencies (SEA).

CONCLUSIONS

Webster's New World Dictionary defines "oxymoron" as - "a figure of speech in which opposite or contradictory terms or ideas are combined." (Webster's, 1978) Can mandated accountability be an effective means for effecting school reform or are "mandated accountability" and "school reform" contradictory or conflicting terms?

The evidence favoring the efficacy of mandated accountability as a tool for reform is weak at best. Does this mean that we should abandon accountability and seek only other paths to reform? Probably not. Accountability has a legitimate role to play in school reform and restructuring by stimulating the generation and reporting of data needed to ascertain whether attempts at reform have had their desired effect. In other words it provides a strong stimulus for developing an information system, without which reform efforts would be oprating blindly. However using accountability as the primary means to achieve reform is somewhat analogous to using a tape measure as the treatment to reduce one's waist size. Frequent and accurate monitoring, using reliable and valid assessment tools is necessary to measuring progress, but it will not, in and of itself, cause desired change.

Large scale, sustainable, educational improvements can occur only after a knowledge base has been developed that links effective practices in education with definable student characteristics. Development of this knowledge base requires research targeted at gaps in learning between groups of students with different characteristics, in order to find out which instructional strategies work best with which types of students. As our student population continues to diversify, the shotgun approaches to instruction used in the past will not result in the needed improvements that will prepare today's students for the increasingly complex and competitive world in which they will live.

Mandated reform that is not accompanied by well funded technical assistance designed to bring about desired changes in teaching and management practices is no more likely to succeed today than it did in the past. Such technical assistance must draw from the knowledge base discussed above to help local schools match the most effective instructional strategies with the appropriate student group characteristics. It would probably be cost prohibitive in all but a few states for SEAs to provide technical assistance to every school that might need it. However, such technical assistance programs could be operated by SEAs to train personnel at the local level, who then could train others in their own districts.

Incentive systems such as those found in the California School Recognition Program, as well as other states including South Carolina, and Georgia, must balance sanctions with rewards and provide needed assistance to those districts and schools that do not meet the standards or goals set by the State. Such systems should be based on multiple indicators, rather than on test scores alone, in order to prevent narrowing of the curriculum and the problems of teaching to the test.

This paper has shown that the basic assumptions underlying the current accountability movement are flawed. If accountability is to serve a constructive role in educational reform, that is to result in something more than mindless compliance behavior by district and school personnel, it must engender change in the cultural values of educators at all levels. Teachers must perceive it as valuable and use it in a constructive fashion. Building and central office administrators must view it as more meaningful than a bureaucratic requirement. Community involvement must be value driven, data-based and well orchestrated.

In summary, mandated accountability can provide a useful lever for educational restructuring if the following conditions are met:

1.) Accountability systems must be outcome focused and based on a broadly defined set of indicators.

2.) Governmentally imposed goals or standards must be realistically attainable by every district or school to which they pertain.

3.) The culture of the districts and schools must be changed through a systemic process that includes staff development and technical assistance aimed at the unit of change, the individual school.

4.) Incentives and sanctions must be balanced in such a way that schools and districts are not humiliated or punished for their failed attempts

5.) Mandated accountability must incorporate a research data base that links input, output and contextual variables in a manner that provides information useful in deciding which instructional processes work best with different groups of students.

6.) Resources must be made available to enable districts and schools that are not meeting desired goals to develop appropriate intervention strategies, based on the research data base.

Meeting these conditions can help to assure that "educational reform through mandated accountability" is not an oxymoron.

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